

## 1.3

# Organizing for collegial governance

In 1994, CAUT's Executive Secretary Donald Savage observed:

Collective Bargaining brings reality to [collegiality]. Without it, university administrators can either ignore the faculty or go through the motions of consultation prior to implementing what they had intended in the first place. It was this fake collegiality ... that prompted unionization and explains ... the initial strategy of CAUT in using collective bargaining to secure effective democratization and fair appeals mechanisms (Savage 1994: 382).<sup>1</sup>

Far from posing a threat to collegial governance, as some predicted then, organizing power strengthened collegiality by securing contractual rights that backed up faculty claims to share in decision-making and priority-setting.

### What's at stake? The renewed need for organizing today

Three decades on, academic staff across the country are again reporting "fake collegiality" at work even where the formal structures of collegiality have long been won. The constraints reflect workplace conditions and corporate-style management approaches that effectively contain or marginalize academic staff involvement in decision-making and priority-setting at every level.

Collegial governance today is challenged by external factors too, many of them stemming from cuts to public funding and efforts to transform public education to serve market interests. Intensified employment precarity challenges the capacity of academics to engage robustly in collegial activities, as some are contractually excluded from doing so while permanent academic staff are spread thin. Efforts to make up for lost public revenues with private sector donors and tuition-paying students — particularly international students — can distort academic priorities and activities.

Private sector consultants too often guide what should be collegial governance activities ranging from searches for academic administrators to the development of strategic plans and the "onboarding" of new governors, reinforcing corporate-sector approaches. These include a model of fiduciary responsibility ill-suited to public universities and colleges, where undue demands for secrecy and loyalty are at odds with academic freedom and collegiality.<sup>2</sup>

Governments directly and indirectly influence academic institutions through such measures as general austerity coupled with targeted funding of favoured programs, as well as market-driven assessment and funding formulae.

Against this backdrop, the organizing power of academic staff associations provides the basis for achieving true collegiality. Otherwise, fake collegiality will prevail, strengthening management control less by pulling the wool over our eyes than by fostering a politics of resignation where academic staff who see what is going on make a calculated decision not to waste time in rubber-stamping exercises.

Conversely, association members organized around governance are members who are already connected to their union colleagues and better prepared to mobilize during bargaining, job action and other collective actions, including actions aimed at countering the erosion of public post-secondary education outlined above, itself a critical condition for meaningful collegiality.

## **How can we organize for collegial governance?**

As outlined elsewhere in this Governance Library, academic staff unions should bargain for collective agreement provisions that strengthen their members' ability to engage in collegial governance and allow the union to grieve administrative overreach or violations of collegial rights. These provisions may pertain directly to governance, or they may contribute to the wider conditions needed for robust collegiality, such as:

- job security
- complement language
- promotion and tenure criteria
- equity provisions that address barriers to participation (for example, childcare)

Gaining a mandate to bargain for collegial governance is one dimension of "organizing for collegiality." Ensuring that the association's own governance structures fit it to do so is another (see the "Top-level checklist" document).

Academic staff associations should also fortify and protect collegiality by ensuring that existing provisions are used to their potential:

- Map and analyze your governance context, attending to:
  - Institutional, political, legislative and collective agreement opportunities, gaps and barriers relating to collegial governance.
  - The material organization of collegiality: In the post-pandemic context, is collegiality conditioned by re-organized forums and methods, such as the routinization of online meetings? Such changes need to be analyzed for their effects on the quantity and quality of academic staff participation.
  - Actual and potential allies and enemies.
- Survey your membership about what matters to them about governance and in the institution more broadly, as well as what stops them from pursuing these matters by being more (effectively) involved in collegial activities: Workload/burnout? A sense of futility? Lack of support? Lack of recognition or a sense that “service doesn’t count”?
- Develop a clear picture of what issues members care most about. Decide on the highest-priority changes to address, with goal setting exercises that are highly visible, inclusive and democratic. Throughout, when engaging with members, connect collegial governance to issues people care about (for example, workload). Consider how these issues might be addressed through the various strategies outlined in this section.
- Include interest in and affinity for governance matters in membership mapping exercises and one-on-one meetings with members. Identify members with influence on governance issues.
- Listen for employer narratives and the narratives circulating among the membership; work to develop a new positive vision that will replace anti-collegial narratives. Organize members to fill key governance roles by encouraging astute and influential members to run for elected positions, preferably in groups able to support one another.
- Create a welcome email/package for new senators/governors from the association; offer senator mentoring and development.

- Hold events for new senators, combining information about available association resources and support with a social dimension.
- Build members' interest in and ability to engage effectively in decision-making bodies and processes, for example through:
  - Including governance in new member orientation activities.
  - Engaging in issue and agenda-package tracking; look for ways to get academic staff concerns onto the senate agenda.
  - Providing caucus space. (Those with concerns about whether such collective efforts may impinge on the independence of academic staff involved in governance activities might recall that administrators see it as completely legitimate to work in caucuses complete with support staff and often engage in bloc voting.)
  - Training and educating members for effective interventions in governance forums, such as drafting and securing support for resolutions, and participating in debates.
  - Providing information about key issues.
  - Hold annual/semi-annual meetings of academic staff senators and governors so that members can debrief on the state of governance, raise questions or matters of common concern, etc.
- Support members' involvement in policy and planning exercises, for example by alerting them to policy reviews and providing information and analysis about the issues at stake. Consider including time to discuss governance issues at member meetings or hosting forums to address them.
- Run campaigns to bolster collegial governance in focused areas, for example, calling for open administrative searches or better information-sharing, including budget and finance transparency. In keeping with the organizing model, such campaigns will include member actions.
- Provide analysis, support and means for rapid action in cases where a collegial issue needs to be addressed urgently. Examples might include online letter campaigns or parallel votes in faculty councils across the institution. Such votes offer an important opportunity to build momentum and educate members ahead of senate votes.

- Write op-eds or use other media opportunities to educate the wider public about why collegial governance is crucial for good quality post-secondary education.
- Build coalitions with student unions and other allies.

## Endnotes

<sup>1</sup>“Universities and Collective Bargaining.” Interchange 25/4: 381-384.

<sup>2</sup>See CAUT’s Legal Advisory on Fiduciary Responsibility.

This document is part of CAUT’s Governance Library, an evolving collection of resources for supporting member associations in efforts to strengthen systems of collegial governance at their institutions and to protect and foster academic staff voices within them.

Feedback and suggestions for continued library development are welcome. Please contact CAUT’s Governance Committee at [governance-gouvernance@caut.ca](mailto:governance-gouvernance@caut.ca).



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